

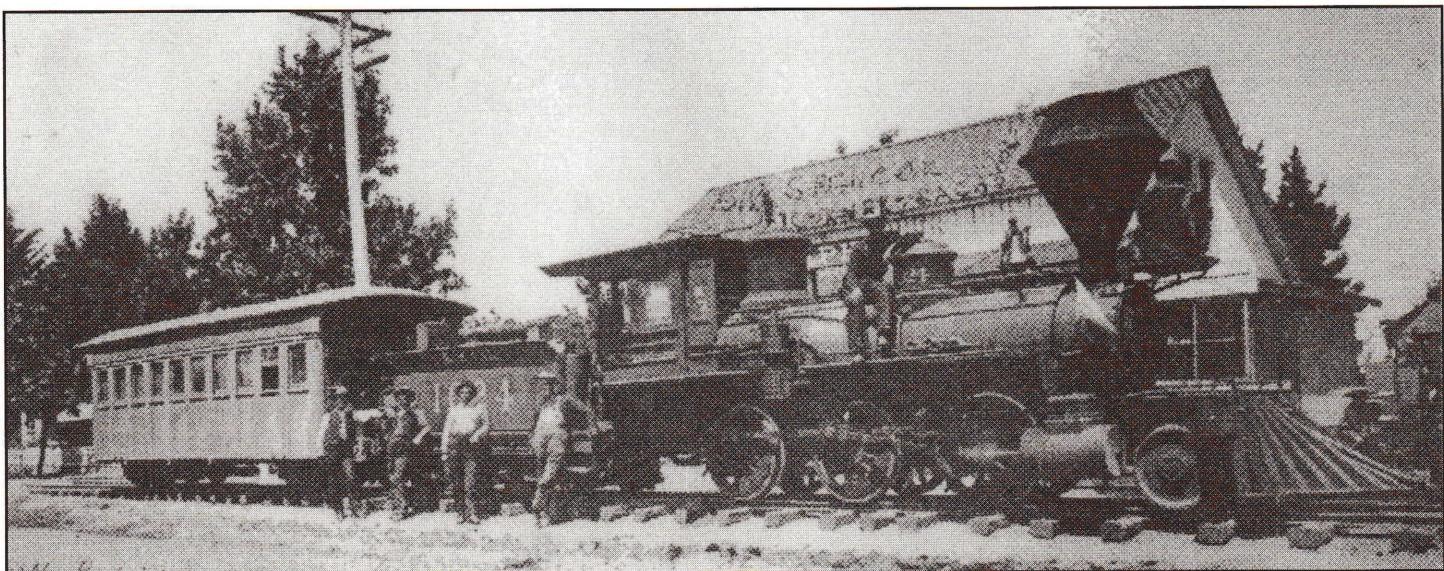
Incorporated October 20, 1988

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 4

LODI HISTORIAN

FALL 1994

SAN JOAQUIN & SIERRA NEVADA RAILROAD



▲ Southern Pacific Locomotive #1024, originally #2 of the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad, parked on Lockeford and Sacramento Streets in 1902.
Photo courtesy of the Bank of Stockton.

The railroad was the greatest development for the land locked areas of central California in 1869. Ten years later there was dissatisfaction with the monopoly operation of the railroad. The farmers not located near the railroad as well as mines, timber and resort areas had to rely on wagons and dry weather over bad roads.

There was discussion in Stockton the summer of 1880 in regard to building a narrow gauge railroad from Stockton to Bodie while passing the Calaveras Big Trees. Despite general interest the plan was dropped when unable to raise funds for a survey.

November 19, 1881 the Lodi Sentinel reported a proposition under consideration to build a narrow gauge railroad from the town of Woodbridge to the head of a newly constructed canal built by Jacob Brack. He had dredged a canal on his Otter Slough, later named Hog Slough from the Moke-

lumne River to the east one one-half miles, 40 feet wide and six and one-half feet deep.

In 1875 Brack brought 10,000 acres between Woodbridge and the Mokelumne River in the Union Township. He planted 2,000 acres to wheat.

Six years later Brack's Landing was used as a shipping point for agriculture produce and freight. In 1881 there were 50,000 sacks of wheat loaded on various steamers and proved to be a cheaper outlet for farm products.

Jacob Brack bought the steamer Caroline, named for his daughter. The boat would load about 2,000 sacks of grain plus 5,000 more for his barge which was towed by the steamer.

It would take three days to make a round-trip to Port Costa, where a large portion of the grain was shipped to England.

A public meeting was held in Lockeford on December 2, 1881 to discuss

the question of forming a company to build a three foot narrow gauge railroad to help ward off the monopoly of the Central Pacific Railroad.

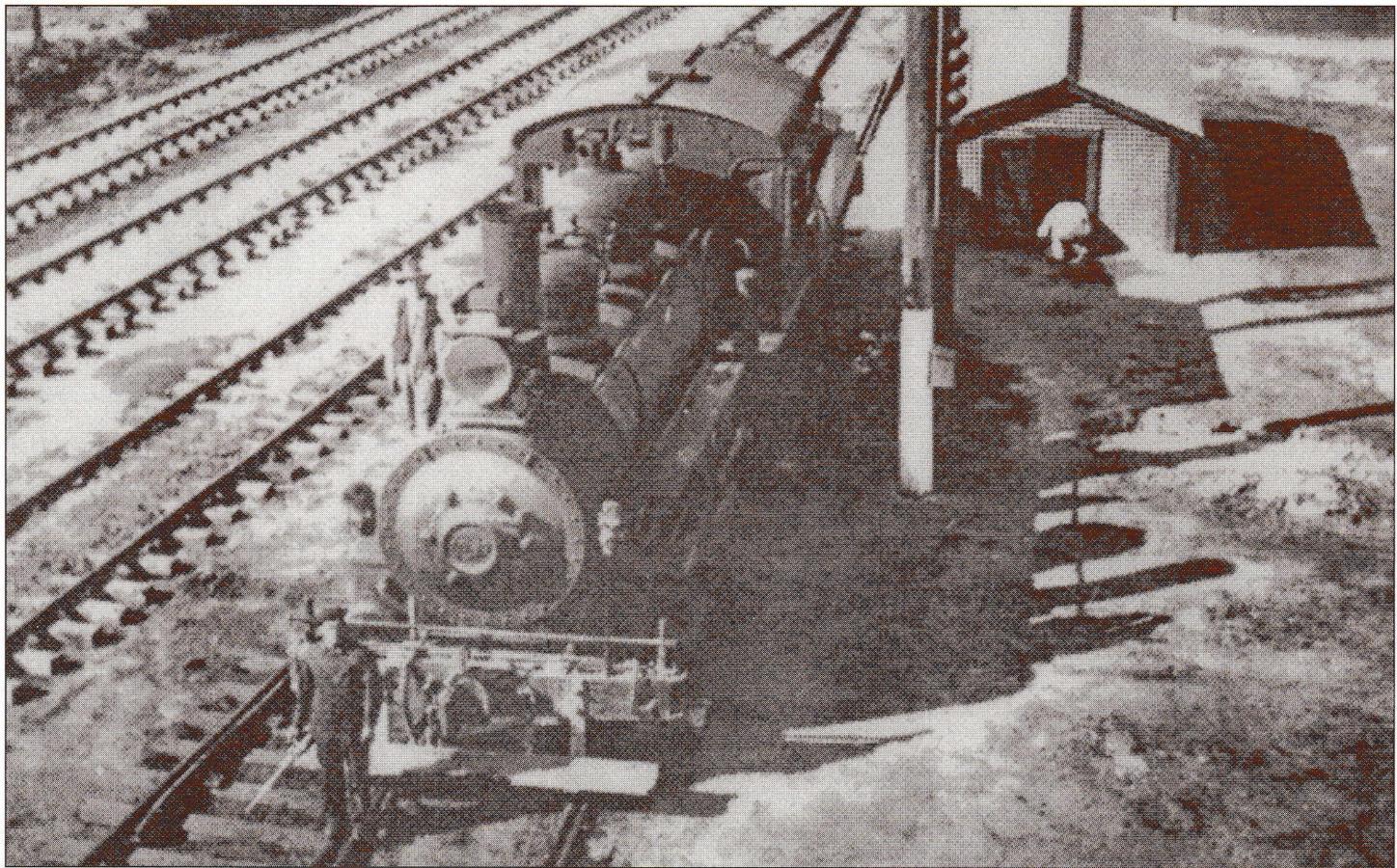
There was talk of the city of Stockton considering a tax of warehouse storage on their channel.

At the meeting the residents of Lockeford, Lodi, Woodbridge and Camanche had a favorable discussion. It was reported that Brack's Landing was 28 miles nearer to San Francisco. Farmers were expecting to save as much as \$100.00 a day hauling their grain to Stockton over poor dirt roads.

Dr. Horace Bentley stated flatly that the people of Woodbridge would have nothing to do with the railroad if the Big Four monopoly was allowed to control it.

Jacob Brack, although a supporter, wanted people to use his canal but vowed to stop any monopoly.

A committee composed of Jacob Brack



▲ When the engines were converted to diesel, the storage tank was located in Lodi on Lockeford Street where Central Avenue would have crossed. Photo courtesy of Bank of Stockton.

and Dr. Bentley of Woodbridge, Watson C. Green of Lodi, Captain Holman and Dr. D.J. Locke of Lockeford, and John Story of Camanche, was formed to work out the plan and location of the railroad.

On January 7, 1882 the committee had a resolution drawn up. It recommended a company be organized to build a narrow gauge railroad from Brack's Landing to Woodbridge, Lodi, Lockeford and Camanche.

Dr. H. Bentley was elected president and W.C. Green elected secretary. The resolution was amended to "the most feasible point at tidewater," instead of Brack's Landing. Captain Holman was engaged to make a survey of the sloughs near the south fork of the Mokelumne.

At the next meeting of the board, secretary Green reported that Captain Holman had not as yet started the survey so his contract was nullified as the directors thought maybe the work was not necessary as the meandering of the two sloughs had been determined by previous surveys and are a matter of public record.

All that was left was the sounding of

sloughs. The directors decided that they should go with R.H. Leonard, Civil Engineer and inspect Otter and Sycamore Sloughs.

Starting at Brack's Landing the party of men, Charles Beamt, W.C. Green, Thos. Clements, A.T. Ayers, B.F. Langford, G.C. Holman and H.R. Leonard found the depth from 12 - 20 feet up to Mokelumne.

After staying the night at the home of R.C. Sargent the next day was spent examining the Sycamore Slough for depth and found to be 6-22 feet deep and more crooked than Otter.

The next meeting of the group was the first week of February and involved a proposal by Jacob Brack. He offered a right of way through his land and the use of his levees for a road bed. He further stated that he would give ten acres of land for a depot and warehouse plus his canal for ten thousand dollars in cash provided that the railroad be a narrow gauge and if the company ever fell into the hands of a monopoly, all the land would return to his possession.

The Board of Directors discussed the proposal and formally accepted it.

The San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada

Railroad Company was incorporated March 28 of 1882 by Fredrick Birdsall, Horace Bentley, Thomas McConnell, Samuel Washburn, Jacob Brack, Benjamin F Langford, James B. Sperry and Connor Birdsall.

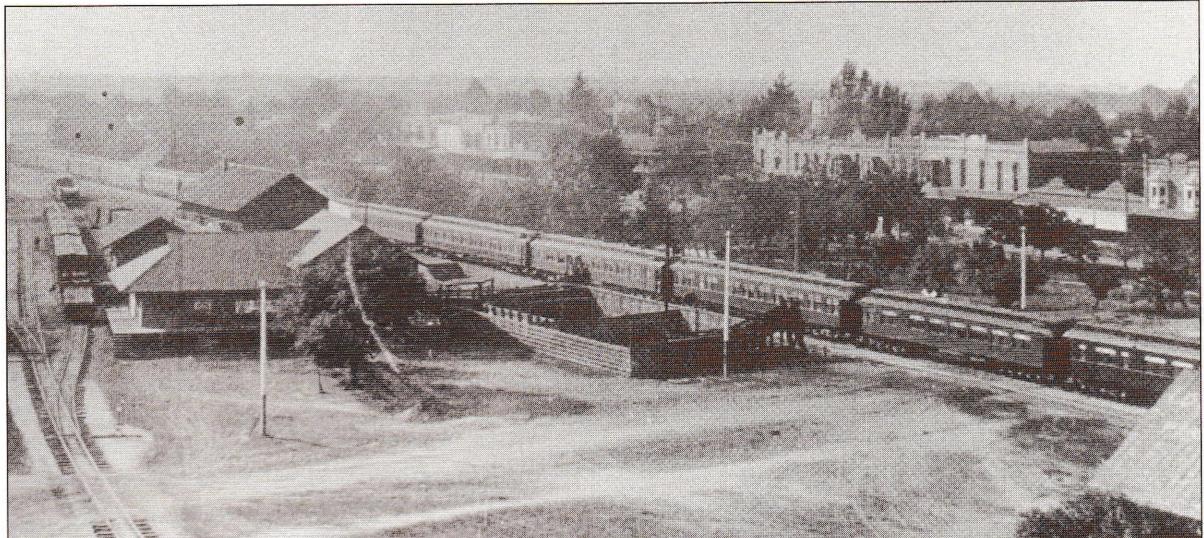
It was granted permission to build its three foot wide rail line from Brack's Landing to the Big Trees Resort in Calaveras County, a distance of some 70 miles.

The company issued 10,000 shares of stock with a par value of \$100.00 a share. Although the Birdsall family purchased the major part of the shares, there were 126 stockholders in San Joaquin and Calaveras Counties.

James Sperry and his brothers of the Stockton Sperry Flour Co. also invested heavily and promoted the sale of stock among the farmers of the mountain county in anticipation of gain for his Big Trees Hotel.

One of the staunchest supporters of the proposed railroad project was the Lodi Sentinel. Through numerous editorials the paper pointed out that the fact that it would be narrow gauge prevented the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad from ever forming

The Lodi Depot of the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad was on the east side of the Central Pacific between Elm and Pine Streets. It included depots for passenger and freight, stockyard and an ice house. The latter was retired in 1919 and twenty years later a packing shed was built.



ing any alliance with the dreaded monopoly, Central Pacific Rail Co.

Lodi's other newspaper, The Valley Review was not as enthusiastic or as favorable to the new railroad and maintained that the new company was attempting to force money and land gifts from the citizens of the area.

Jacob Brack had driven the first spike on April 22, 1882. The Sentinel noted in its April 29th editorial that the new railroad did reflect the interest of the surrounding communities by a deliberate effort to pass through existing settlements as the line progressed eastward from Brack's Port.

The Pacific Rolling Mills was given a contract for the first thirty miles of track. Two hundred and fifty tons of steel rails were shipped to Brack's Landing. By April 1882 the actual construction was begun with 75 workers and 50 horses working a seven-day work week. The men were paid \$1.15 per day for their labor.

John Posey, an early pioneer farmer living on Ray Road decided to earn some money. Meals were included and on the first dinner call all the hands ran for the cook house. By the time John washed in the slough most of the food was gone. He then had a choice of doing as others or go without eating.

The soft nature of the soil was one of the problems faced in the construction. To make the roadbed firm and level about two feet of dirt in height was loaded at Brack's Landing on flat cars and spread where needed. The graders had reached the Harmony Grove church by the middle of May.

June 8, 1882 a celebration was held at Woodbridge in honor of the first narrow

gauge train to enter the town. The reception committee of Horace Bentley, E.G. Rutledge, Richard Cope, B.R. Woods and Dr. Simms was ready in the early afternoon. John Thompson called the meeting to order and honorable E.J. McIntosh was made President of the day.

At about four o'clock, the train of eight cars, drawn by the Ernie Birdsall arrived and was boarded by almost 500 people. The train ran at high speed, although the track was newly laid, the passengers thought it had less jar than is felt upon the smoothest broad gauge rail.

The Booming Cannon, fired by Mr. Van Vlear and John Robinette greeted the return of the train. Reverend Compton made a brief, appropriate speech welcoming the railroad on behalf of the town and people.

Those who were unable to board the first train now loaded the seats for their ride.

Throughout the day Houseman's Cornet Band of Lodi played for the crowd. Supper was served at the Plummer House and meats, fruit and cake was available in a large tent on the street. A grand ball that evening closed the day's celebration.

Late June the wharf at Brack's Landing was completed with two tracks. One was higher

than the other to facilitate the loading and unloading of the cars from the steamboats. The steamer Centennial made regular runs and passengers fare was 50 cents for a place on the deck and \$1.00 for a cabin. Freight

Edna Ivory on the left and Ethel Wright pose on the new wide gauge railroad track at Lockeford and Sacramento Streets in 1904. Note the Southern Pacific water tank in the background.



could be shipped to Benicia, Vallejo, Port Costa and the Washington Street wharf in San Francisco.

July 1882 the railroad was operating to Lockeford with 45 flat cars, 15 box cars and 12 assorted railroad cars. A month later thirty miles of tracks were laid, having past the town of Clements and near the San Joaquin-Calaveras County line.

The San Francisco Chronicle newspaper, speaking editorially on August 19, 1882 of the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad. Now in the course of construction from the tide water terminus, Brackville to 35 miles east. It is the intention to build the road on through the Calaveras foothills and far into the lumber region where the best sugar pines grow. The narrow gauge can be constructed for half the cost of the ordinary broad gauge road.

In the near future the citizens will hold a jubilee when the narrow gauge railroad is completed from Brack's to Lodi. By this

time the two new locomotives, Jacob Brack and Ben Langford will be on rail for inspection. They plan on having over a hundred ladies and gentlemen to comprise the committee which has secured music by The Silvertown Band for dancing, lunch and excursion on the new track.

The first engine #1, named Ernest Birdsall is a six ton beauty manufactured by Baldwin Locomotive Works. The next two were built by Poter-Bell, 21 tons. Later two more engines were received.

All were wood burners with boilers that needed water. Tanks were constructed near each station stop. It was the duty of the station master to keep young boys from climbing the wooden structures and pumping water into the tanks with hand pumps.

The town of Woodbridge donated four acres to the railroad with the stipulation that the headquarters, round house, workshops and depot be built upon the site. This was the only depot with a second story

which held the offices of the president, Birdsall, the surveyor, the superintendent and the passenger and freight agents.

Senator Ben Langford locomotive hauls 40 tons of wheat in wagons attached to it, and operated between Langford Ranch and Brack's Landing.

The locomotive burns wood at 50 cents a cord. The only disadvantage — its wheezing which frightens horses and has caused several runaways.

September 1882 on the narrow gauge between Lodi and Woodbridge, the engineer discovered a railroad tie on the track but not soon enough to avoid it. A couple of more sticks were found. It was suspected someone was trying to do harm.

September 30, 1882. The trains have been running for the past two or three days, hauling and filling in dirt for the Lodi depot on the lot of Mrs. McKinney opposite the E. Lawrence residence.

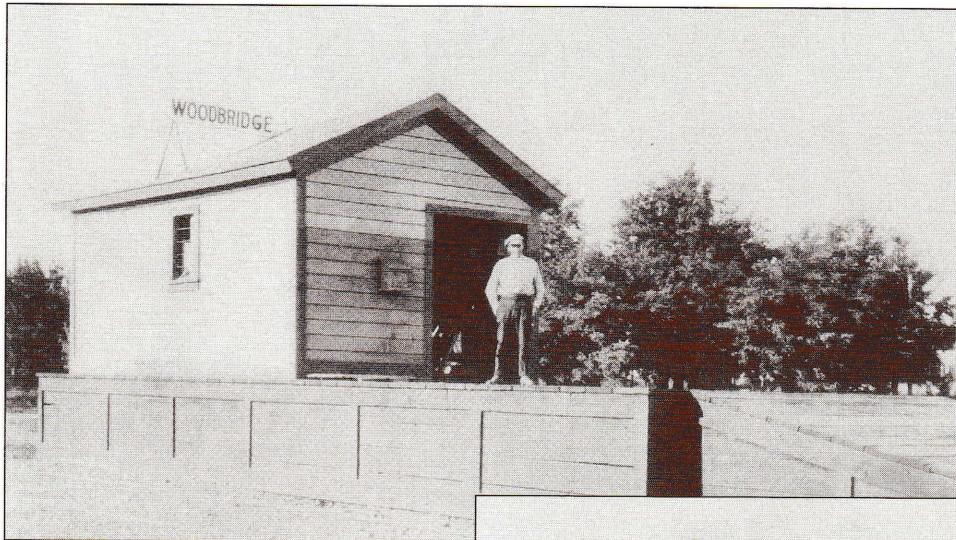
The San Joaquin and Nevada Railroad was to have a number of passenger cars. The first was named "Ettie" in honor of the president's wife. It was upholstered in red plush with one long seat on each side. There was a small water tank in one corner with a public dipper attached.

Five new combination box cars have been received from the east.

A side track for LaRue and Boag's Warehouse at Lockeford where five cars of wheat were shipped this week direct to Vallejo.

A shipment of fruit this week from Clements.

The blacksmith shop at Woodbridge is

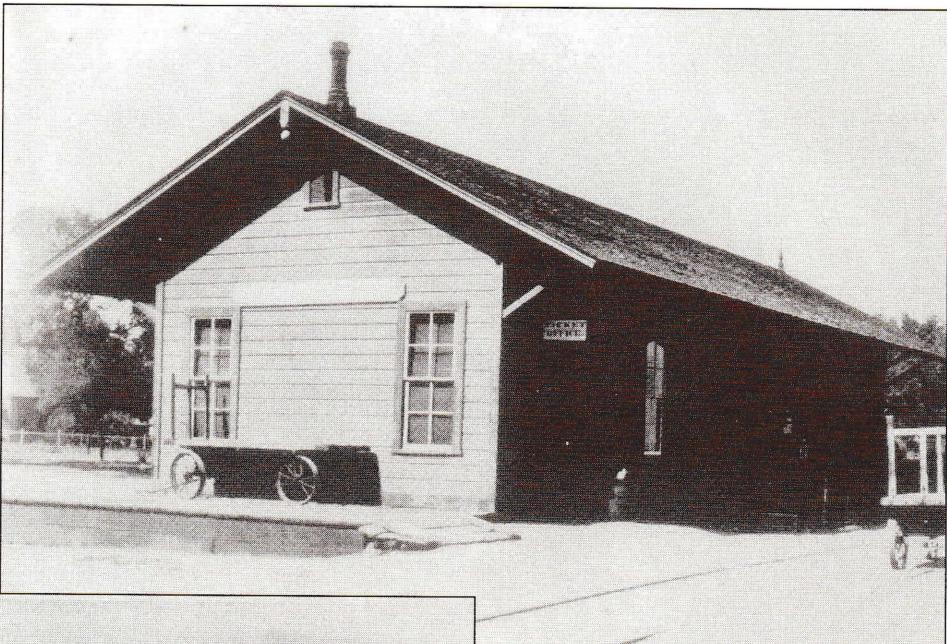


▲
The Woodbridge freight platform was enclosed in 1914. Two years later a packing shed was added. The shed lasted until 1935 and the depot was retired in 1948.

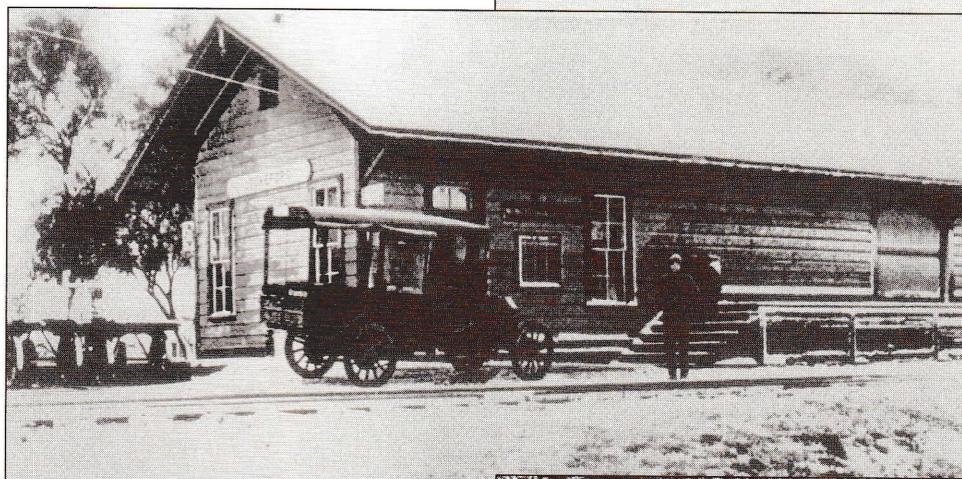


►
Woodbridge was the headquarters for the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad. This ended when the railroad changed hands. A one-story frame and platform build in 1908 shown here five years later.

Lockeford freight and passenger depot plus stockyard were built in 1882 and used until 1953. Picture taken in 1913.



January 1, 1916 it snowed at the Lockeford depot. Delivery truck and freight wagons parked outside. Photo courtesy of the San Joaquin Historical Society.



completed plus the telephone line now operating between Lockeford, Woodbridge and the Landing.

More flat cars were ordered to meet the demands of increased business.

September 30, 1882. Trains of twenty cars and more from the upper end of the narrow gauge, loaded with copper, grain, hides, etc.

Engineer Wallace will resume survey into Calaveras County.

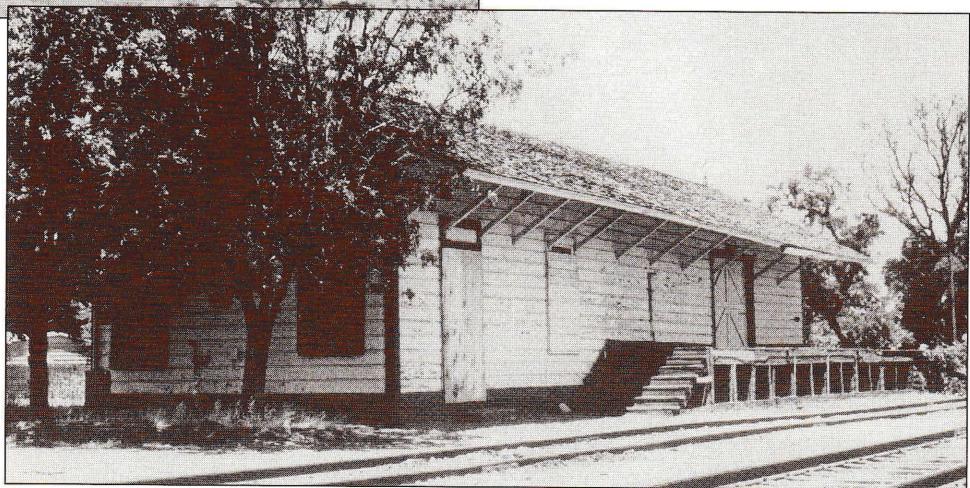
Trains commenced running on time last Thursday and time tables are available at the different stations.

At Lodi Mr. W.H. Lawrence has been appointed agent for the company and the Locke-Lawrence Warehouse will be used for a temporary depot.

Telephone line from Landing to Clements plus Lodi is in operation.

Depot at Lockeford completed. Clements is building a depot.

Samuel Washburn, a superintendent of



the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad Co. announced that on Tuesday next a regular time table will be established by what trains will run from county line to the Landing on the mornings of Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, connecting at Lodi with the 7:20 local express and the 1:00 p.m. Central Pacific on the return trip

from Brack's.

Copper ore in considerable quantities is hauled from the mines around Lancha Plana, gold rush town to Clements and thence on the narrow gauge to the bay.

New machine shop is nearing completion at Woodbridge and new brick store for Richard Cope.



The Clements depot in 1920; the passenger and freight loading plus a nearby stockyard.

Contractor McDonald nearly completed grain warehouse at Landing.

Once the railroad crossed the county line another station was established in honor of Mr. I. Wallace, the former San Joaquin county surveyor who is now serving as the engineer for the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada railroad.

The contract for the construction of the line from Wallace to Valley Springs was awarded to Capt. H.A. Messenger of Valley Springs. The pace of construction slowed to a crawl because of the mountain terrain. Six miles later another station was created called Helisma. The area was later called "Burson" for Daniel Burson. While serving as the terminus of the railroad, freight bound for nearby mines was unloaded there.

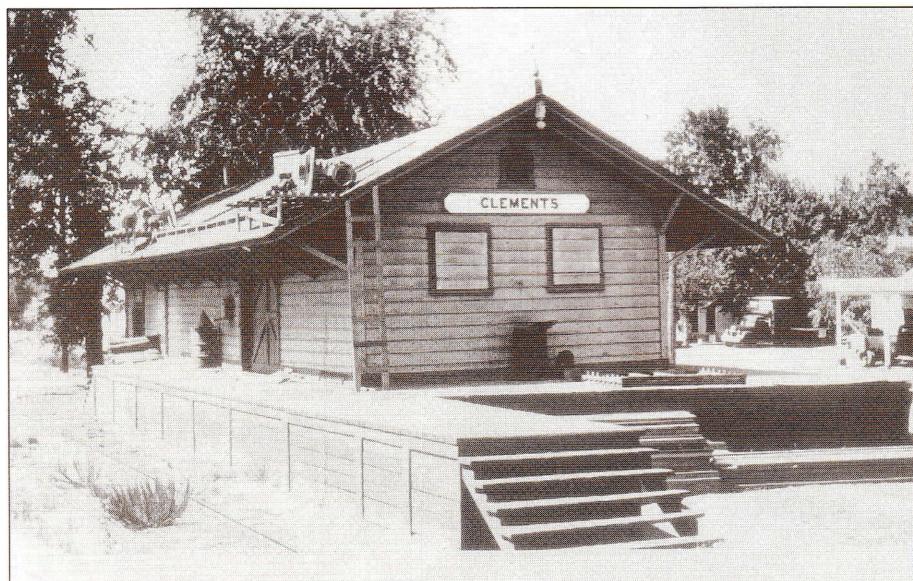
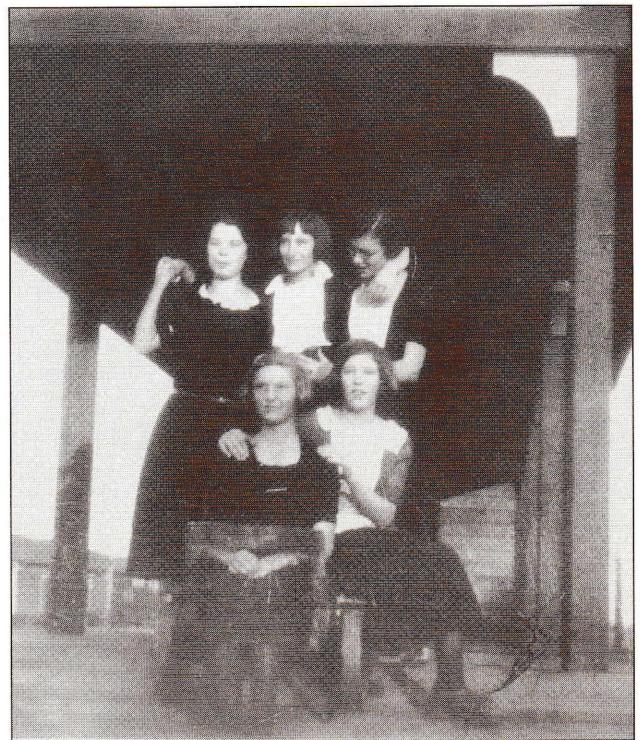
It was April 1885 before the tracks finally reached Valley Springs. The plan was to continue on to the Big Trees but this was not to happen.

The following year problems began to appear in regards to the paying of the \$9,000

interest owed on its bonds, in spite of handling 60,000 tons of wheat and freight. There was also concern that the railroad bed between Woodbridge and the Landing was too soft to be traveled in times of high water.

Rumors were being published in May 1886 that the narrow gauge was in trouble. The crushing blow came with the death of its chief financier and president. October 20th the Birdsall heirs sold their 230,000 shares of stock for a mere \$80,000 to the Northern Railroad, which merged into the Southern Pacific ten years later.

Undaunted by the change in management of



Victor freight platform and shed built in 1908 which was the start of the town. In 1937 the freight depot was moved from west of Bruella Road to the east near Victor School. Girls on Platform: Vi and Edna Ulmer, Hazel Morden, C. Wageman and Edna Bechthold. The packing shed was built in 1939, but all buildings were retired by 1950.

Photo courtesy of Edna Hensel.

Swamp coolers were added to the roof of the Clements depot by 1940. The building would be used seven more years.

the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad, Jacob Brack made large improvements in the Landing now in his possession once more. Brack built a large dredger in 1888 for \$20,000 to build more levees in order to reclaim thousands of acres of swamp land.

Two years later the dredge burned but Jacob replaced it and by August 1891 he had just completed dredging his canal four miles east from the Mokelumne River. It was sixty feet wide and 170 feet the last quarter of a mile.

Brack intended to add new warehouses by the spring of 1892 but by this time the new railroad company had other plans for much of the freight by diverting on to the standard gauge in Lodi.

After this only a few trains made their way to Brack's Landing and in 1897 ten and one-half miles of track were removed west of Woodbridge. Ross Sargent used the redwood ties for fence posts.

The railroad re-lettered its some 70 cars and the operation used about 25 employees. The time table indicated both passenger and mixed trains running six days a week, with passenger service on Sundays.

The transfer of goods from the narrow gauge to the standard proved to be too costly and in 1904 the line was converted by the end of August. The shops at Woodbridge were torn down and new facilities were constructed on Lockeford Street and Garfield in Lodi; roundhouse, ice house and packing shed near Elm and Main Streets plus stockyard.

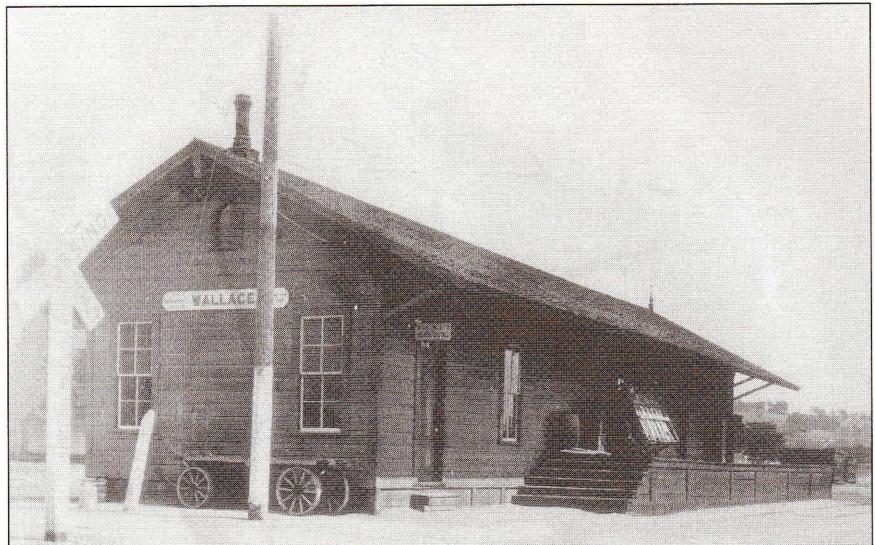
Woodbridge built a one-story depot and platform in 1908 and a packing shed a few years later. In the same year, Victor received an open freight shed which started this little settlement and later added a packing shed.

Lockeford, Clements and Valley Springs had passenger and freight depots with stock corrals.

Wallace had a passenger and freight depot but Helisma (Burson) had only freight. Valley Springs had a round house for turning the engines and living quarters for agent.

For the next 18 years the Lodi-Valley Springs branch continued to haul agriculture, mining and some lumber. Even though the automobile was becoming popular the railroad passenger service was steady.

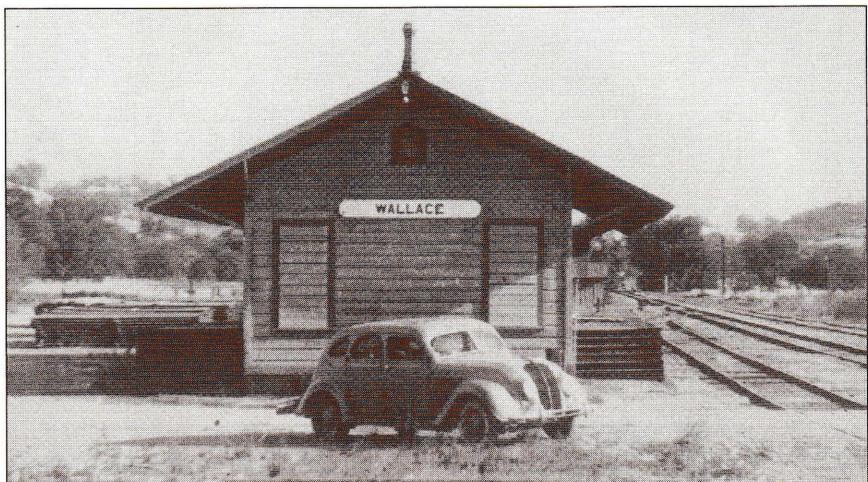
In 1922 William Macnider discovered huge limestone deposits at the site of the



▲ The Wallace passenger and freight depot in 1912. This was the end of the line in 1882.

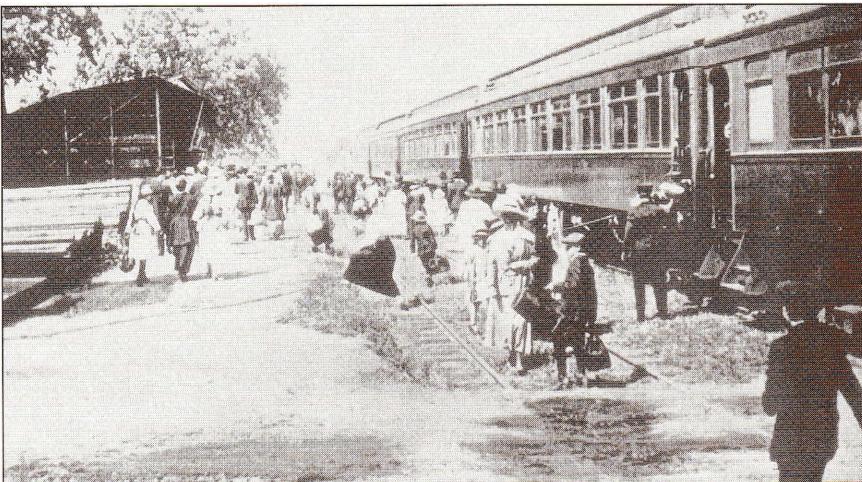
The Wallace depot in 1940 with a Chrysler Air Flow parked out front. The station was in use for thirteen more years.

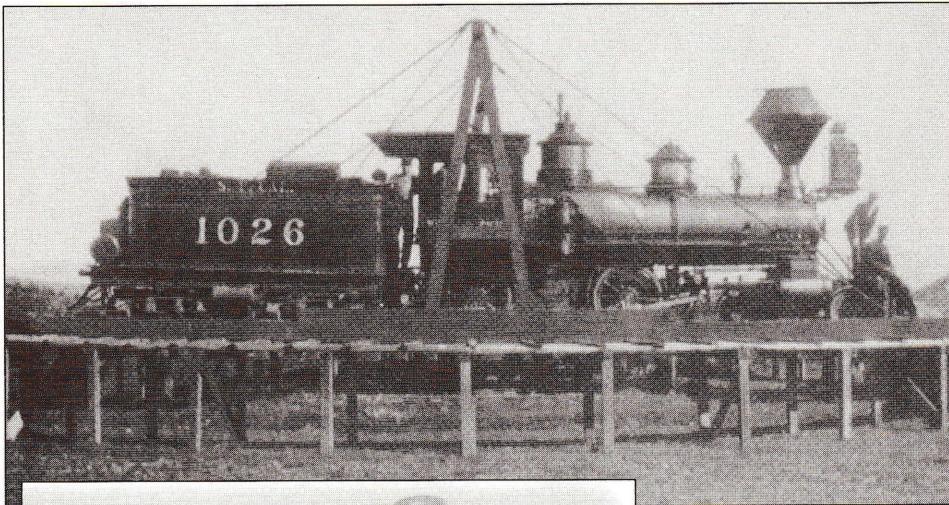
▼ Photo courtesy of Henry E. Bender.



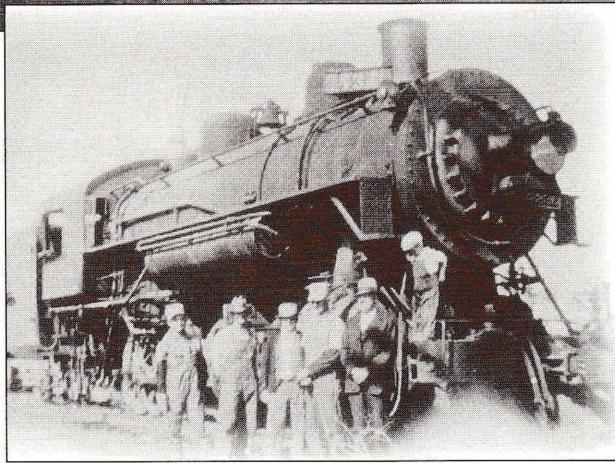
Passengers unloading at the Annual Lockeford Picnic on May 31, 1918. The passengers were gone in 1932 and the freight stopped October 1945.

▼ Photo courtesy of the San Joaquin Historical Society.



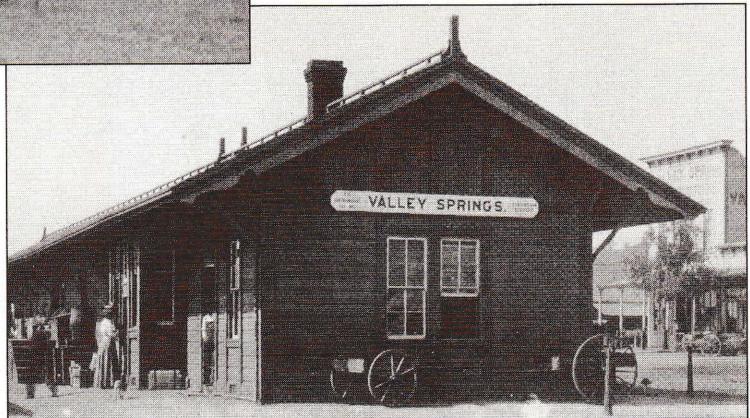


The turntable at Valley Springs. The Southern Pacific Engine Number 1026 was the old Number 4 (the Jacob Brack), originally the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada engine.



Lower left: The Valley Springs Limited, Number 434 that hauled cement with F.H. Jefford, conductor, A.C. Kolb, engineer, Robt. A. Richards, Telegraph Operator (in suit), E. Kirk, Breakman, W.E. David, Fireman, and Mr. Mason. Photo courtesy of the San Joaquin Historical Society.

The depot for passengers and freight was built in 1891 and used by the railroad until 1961. It is the only building that still stands, although now used for a real estate office in Valley Springs. ▼



Kentucky House, a hotel-inn in the center of the gold mining.

William Mein of San Francisco, realizing the potential for the manufacture of cement acquired the acreage where the deposits were found. He then raised some two

million dollars for a cement plant and the Calaveras Cement Co. was incorporated.

Rail transportation was necessary before the cement could be marketed. The nearest track was at Valley Springs, almost 13 miles away. The Southern Pacific agreed to extend its line some eight miles to a point on the Calaveras River. The cement company would have to finance and build the remaining five miles.

Construction on the rail line extension was started May 1, 1925 and completed 24 December of the same year. A dedication day barbecue was held for 15,000 guests May 9, 1926 attended by over twice the population of Calaveras County.

Three years later the Southern Pacific purchased the last four-mile section for \$255,000 which was the exact cost to the cement company.

1927 the Southern Pacific built a temporary line from Valley Springs to the Pardee Dam, a distance of seven miles. This was the first big contract for Calaveras Cement and the cement went directly from plant to dam over the new rail. On completion of the dam in 1929 the seven miles of road bed were removed.

In 1932 the Southern Pacific received permission to abandon its passenger service.

The tracks running east and west from Lodi are the remnants of one of the few railroads that was widened from three feet to a standard gauge.

The cement plant traffic included car loads of coal inbound as well as cement outbound which kept the branch until the plant was closed in 1983. For several years the Southern Pacific stored unneeded freight cars on the sidings. March 14, 1984 the Interstate Commerce Commission authorized service discontinued from Lockeford east but not abandonment of the track.

The last depot is at Valley Springs and is used as a realty office. The rest of the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada buildings are gone. Trains have stopped from Lodi east but the rail bed still serves as a monument to our early pioneers.

REFERENCES

*The San Joaquin & Sierra Nevada Railroad
A thesis by James C. Wagers, May 1974
presented to the History Dept. of San Joaquin Delta College*

*San Joaquin Historian Vol. XI Number 3
July - September 1975 by James C. Wagers
Lodi Sentinel: 1881-1892 and 1922-1929*

*The Valley Review: 1882
Unpublished articles on San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad and Depots by Henry E. Bender, Jr.*

The Lodi Historian

is a quarterly publication of the Lodi Historical Society
P.O. Box 264, Lodi, CA 95241-0264

*Ralph Lea Editor
Lucy Reller Assistant Editor
*Charles Stenson Editorial Assistant

Officers

Nancy Schmer President
Bud Reller 1st Vice President
Susanne Benbrook 2nd Vice President
Janice Roth Treasurer
*Esther Bender Recording Secretary
*Jean Kettlerman Corresponding Secretary

Board of Directors

Jean Bedford	Anne Meyers
Lynn Benbrook	Barbara Peden
*Evelyn Hasbaum	*Walter Scott
Ralph Lea	Del Smith
*Howard Mason	*Violet Stenson
Hugh Metcalf	Bing Taylor
*Gladys Mettler	

History Committee

Howard Mason and Ralph Lea, Co-Chairmen
Frances Scott • Vesta Mason • Ellen Edwards • Lucy Reller

*History Committee Member
All rights to republication are reserved.
Permission to quote or use material herein should be obtained in writing